DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 184 010 CG 014 237

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TITLE Motivations for Motherhood.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Birth Order; *Children; *Females; Feminism; *Mothers; *Motivation; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Role; Religious Factors; Research Projects; Self Concept; *Sex Role; Womens Studies

ABSTRACT

A multivariate exploration of the characteristics of women who want children and what women see as the benefits and costs of motherhood are presented. Among unmarried, childless female college undergraduates (N=184), positive memories of early childhood maternal love, traditional feminine sex role identification and anti-feminist sympathy were the primary unique psychological variables. Significantly correlated with parenthood motivation but not contributing uniquely to it were memories of father's loving care, perceptions of maternal success at and enjoyment of childrearing, and happiness of childhood. Women from large families (three or more siblings) expressed more desire for children than women from smaller families. Religious affiliation and birth order were not related to motivation. Three reasons for having children were uniformly identified as most important by the entire sample and the two extreme groups (markedly feminist and those most anxious to have children). (Author/BMW)

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MOTIVATIONS FOR MOTHERHOOD

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Paper to be presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1978. Thanks are due to Dr. Joan Gay Snodgrass for her consistent encouragement and constructive advice at all stages of the research.

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This research concerned a general question of fundamental importance: why do women want to have children? Answers to this question can help us understand population trends, changing patterns of family structure, and, ultimately, childrearing practices. Yet the issue of simply why people want to have children, aside from how many they want to have, has just begun to be studied (Beckman, 1974; Fawcett, 1974; Hoffman, 1972; Rabin, 1968). Particularly little work has been done on the prospective motivation of younger women, who seem less interested in childrearing than their predecessors of a decade or two decades ago, (Hoffman, 1974) and who may choose to marry only if they want to have children.

It is surprising how little theoretical attention has been devoted to parenthood motivation from a psychological point of view. What there is derives from the mainstream of psychoanalytic theory and from the unique contribution of a few social psychologists.

It is well known that Freud (1933) believed a woman's longing for a penis was basic to her wish for a child; however, less recognized was his belief that women must experience a strong, positive identification with their own mothers as a prelude to fancying motherhood for themselves. Therese Benedek, who has contributed extensively to the psychoanalytic litera-

ture on women, stressed (1960) that the early life experiences of feeling gratified and soothed and therefore "good," become part of the structure of personality and lead directly to the adult wish to nurture offspring of one's own. Erikson (1959) came full circle when he discussed the adult wish to share and give to others, viewing it as a dependent on the trust learned in the beginning, in the first year of life.

Lois Hoffman (1975) writing from a social psychological point of view, has emphasized that to a growing girl, becoming a woman is inseparable from becoming a mother, but she (Hoffman & Wyatt, 1960) has also dealt with the subtle ways that the prevailing culture affects motherhood motivation, a particularly important interaction today in our period of rapidly shifting sex-role standards.

The rather scant empirical research on parenthood motivation has produced a smattering of results that both support and question the theoretical positions outlined above. Women who remember their own parents as energetically devoted to their upbringing, very much wanted children in one study (Lott, 1973), and in another (Bram, 1974), women shied away from motherhood because they felt they weren't suited for it, though whether their lack of confidence reflected faulty maternal identification was not clear. Several researchers have found that women who can be identified as

traditionally feminine want many children, but whether femininity, masculinity or androgyny affects prospective motivation hasn't been studied. One researcher (Lott, 1973) has accounted for the effects of women's liberation ideology, a seemingly important influence on today's college youth.

An effort was made in this study to integrate major theoretical speculations about motherhood motivation and recent empirical findings in order to test a broad range of hypotheses regarding degree of motivation. The orientation of the study was clearly exploratory.

Thus a set of hypotheses regarding what were considered to be major psychological variables was formulated; these variables included parental identification, perception of early childhood care, sex-role identity, and attitudes towards women's liberation. It is impossible today to summarize in detail the empirical origins of the minor hypotheses tested. They were: each subject's perception of: the happiness of her childhood, her effect on her parents, her perception of the enjoyment of and success at childrearing of both of her parents and her career orientation.

Though the focus here was psychological, demographic factors have been so closely associated with fertility behavior that a set of demographic variables culled from relevant studies was included. They were: birth order, religious

upbringing and present religious orientation, and original family size.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Questionnaires were administered to 184 unmarried, childless female undergraduates at New York University. Three-fifths of the subjects were recruited from the Introductory Psychology Course and participated as part of a course requirement and two-fifths were volunteers from other psychology courses. The subjects ranged in age from 16 to 30, with a mean age of 18.7. Their religious affiliations were as follows: 17% Protestant, 41% Catholic, 23% Jewish, and 16% Other.

Measures

Semantic-Differential

Perceived maternal and paternal identification was measured by a form of the Semantic Differential (Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1975). There were three self concepts: myself when I am most comfortable being me; myself when I'm least comfortable being me; myself most of the time; and there were three corresponding concepts for mother and for father. A score of perceived similarity to each parent was determined by using the D statistic (Osgood et al, 1975) and comparing each self concept to each parent concept.

Parent-Child Relations Questionnaire

Perceptions of early childhood care was investigated with the Roe-Siegelman Parent Child Relations Questionnaire (PCR), Short Form Revision of 1973, using the Love-Reject factor of that scale. Instructions call for memories of experience occurring before the age of 12.

Bem Sex-Role Inventory

The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) was the measure used to determine sex-role identity (Bem, 1974); it yields a score of Femininity, Masculinity and Androgyny. In the present study, we computed the Androgyny score by means of an interaction term, which was carried by the product of the Masculinity and Femininity scores with the separate Masculinity and Femininity components partialled from it.

Feminism II

Sympathy for the principles of the women's liberation movement was measured by the Dempewolff Feminism II Scale (Dempewolff, 1972), which was developed at the University of Cincinnati in 1970.

Basic Survey Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed by the experimenter to investigate relevant demographic variables, perceptions of parents' childrearing practices, and subject's career orientation judged by the experimenter to be stereotypically feminine, neuter or masculine.

Dependent variable measure

The dependent variable, degree of parenthood motivation, consisted of six components.

Component one: a 9 point rating in response to the direct question, "How eagerly do you anticipate having children?

Component two: Pursuit value: a ranking of "child raising" relative to nine other adult activities.

Component three: Appeal stages: a rating of six aspects of parenthood, from pregnancy to having grown children.

Component four: Difficulties: motivation in relation to the potential difficulties of parenthood, e.g. financial hardship.

Component five: Role Conflicts, a composite of 11 statements dealing with the female role conflicts posed by motherhood.

Component six: Reasons-Problems, the difference between ratings of reasons for having children and problems of having children. The "reasons" scale is based on Kirchner's (1973) factor analytic work and the "problems" scale was developed by Hoffman based on work with college undergraduates (1972).

The dependent measure was constructed with the intent of sampling as wide a domain of aspects of parenthood motivation as possible. All component scores were standardized and the sum of the six component scores comprised a global measure of motivation.

RESULTS

Regression Analysis

Overall results were analyzed by multiple regression involving a hierarchical ordering of sets of independent variables (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). All the variables together produced a multiple correlation of (R) of .605, accounting for 36.7% of the variance in parenthood motivation.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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The major demographic variables of religious upbringing and birth order were placed in the first set of the equation where they were found to be insignificantly related to parenthood motivation. However, in contrast to the demographic variables, three of the major psychological variables contained in Set 2 of the equation accounted for most of the variance in parenthood motivation. Thus memories of maternal love and a high Femininity score predicted intense motivation for motherhood, whereas sympathy for the principles of the

women's liberation movement predicted low motivation.

We were also interested in testing whether certain of the major psychological variables significantly interacted with one another in relation to motherhood motivation. The interactions we explored were as follows: Femininity in relation to Masculinity or Androgyny; the relationship of maternal to paternal identification or cross-sex identification; and memories of mother's relative to father's love. None of these relationships were significant.

Of the minor variables in the last set, one -- size of original family -- accounted for unique variance in parenthood motivation to a striking degree. Further analysis revealed that it was the high motivation of women coming from families with four or more children that made this variable crucial.

It should be noted that we have been discussing unique contributions to the variance of motherhood motivation thus far. Several factors were significantly correlated with how much women want children but the effects of these variables were not sustained in the total equation. These variables were: memories of father's love, perception of mother as having enjoyed and been successful at childrearing, being raised as a Catholic, and present identification with an organized religion.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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One further analysis regarding femininity should be noted. We found that women with high Femininity scores did not consider childrearing a prerequisite to having an adult female identity, as judged by responses to three questions in the Role Conflicts component of the dependent measure.

Value of Children

The importance rating of every advantage and problem of having children was correlated with scores on each major independent variable. What emerged is a picture of specific values associated with different psychological characteristics; it is too complicated to present here. What is simpler to discuss is the frequency with which each value was judged to be a "main advantage" or problem. The five highest ranked reasons and problems are presented in Table 3.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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Because we were interested in whether there was a difference in the value attributed to children by women high versus low in motherhood motivation, we did an extreme group analysis. Subjects with scores in the top 23% on the measure of sympathy towards women's liberation were compared to subjects

who scored in the tope 23% on the dependent measure of degree of parenthood motivation (with an overlap of one subject). The two groups were very similar in evaluating the advantages of having children, and less similar in identifying problems associated with children (see Table 3).

Future family size

Though the present study investigated degree of motivation rather than expected family size, it is worth noting that these college-age women desire a mean of 2.7 and a mode of 3 children, with nine percent wanting no children at all.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that three psychological variables are uniquely correlated with degree of motherhood motivation.

The contribution of memories of good mothering lend support to the analytic position that early are re-activated later in life and form the basis of adult choice and behavior. In fact, the contrast between the significant effect of early nurturance memories and the non-significant effect of maternal identification, which occurs at a developmental point later in a child's life, may indicate that the crucial imput to motherhood motivation occurs very early in life.

Of course a constraint in interpreting these results is that subjects were reporting memories. Though these memories presumably reflected childhood experiences, they may also

have been organized to support current wishes and choices, so that relationships cannot be considered truly causal.

The fact that Femininity scores were correlated with motherhood motivation extends to prospective motivation what has been indicated for fertility behavior. Women who are identified as traditionally feminine look forward to having children more than less feminine women. Interestingly, they do not consider childbearing as a prerequisite to having a female identity, and thus the frequently stated speculation that women want children to bolster their sense of femininity is questioned by this finding.

It is striking that the interaction term representing androgyny did not account for any unique variance in parenthood motivation. Bem (1974) has described androgynous individuals as both expressive and instrumental. Why, therefore, aren't young women who are comfortable in both the domains of feeling and action eager to become mothers? Why are they less eager than women comfortable only in the realm of feeling and reacting? Perhaps college women identified as androgynous in terms of personality characteristics, nevertheless have rigid, untested ideas about sex-role related functions, and think of motherhood as stereotypically passive and lacking in self-definition.

Certainly sympathy for the women's liberation movement is markedly associated with parenthood motivation, since the negative correlation with Feminism II scores accounted for more variance in motivation than any other major variable. It is noteworthy that in this study the more liberated a woman was, the less she remembered her mother as being loving and nurturing to her in early childhood. Perhaps dependency is difficult for liberated women, and the inevitable dependency, in motherhood, on child-care supports and/or spouse is threatening to these women. However, more rooted in social reality than in theory are the possibilities that motherhood is associated with inferior status for liberated women (Lott, 1973), or that they dread the basic difficulty of balancing career pursuits and childcare responsibilities. To complicate matters further, their attitudes may reflect a particularly intense struggle toward individuation. They may transcend their rejection of their mothers and her role in adulthood; in fact, though less eager to have children, the top quartile of Feminism II subjects said they ultimately wanted a mean of 2.7 children!

Overall, in this study psychological variables accounted for more variance in parenthood motivation than demographic variables. The one uniquely significant demographic factor was the size of a subject's original family, in particular when that family contained four or more sibs. The relevance of family size must be explored further; its effect may lie in the simulation

of parenting that occurs in large families.

When the reasons for having children are examined, it is striking that the same three reasons were identified as most important, and in the same order, by the whole sample and both first quartiles of highly liberated and highly motivated women. Childrearing seems somewhat meshed with childbearing for these women, since the second highest ranking was "to participate in the miracle of birth." It seems unlikely that an alternative satisfaction could be found for this particular value, though presumably the highest ranked value, "to experience the honesty and freshness of children," could be satisfied by contact with children not one's own.

The highest ranked problem cited by the overall sample and the top quartile groups, "it makes it difficult to pursue a career," suggests that young women today view motherhood and career as competing pursuits. The only other highly ranked problem was "they might turn out badly because you didn't do a good job," indicating some concern about competency.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, this study has attempted to identify some of the characteristics of women who do and do not look forward to having children. It has substantiated the importance of psychological characteristics, at least for a college-age educated sample. The study has relevance to population policy makers since it indicates the commonality in the values ascribed

to having children by women with different attitudes and degrees of motivation, and points to the importance of career considerations as a deterrent to childbearing. Clinically, the results indicate that parenthood motivation is multifaceted, varying with psychological characteristics and social attitudes, and should be understood as such in treatment and counselling.

Table 1

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of the Four Sets of Independent Variables and Degree of Parenthood Motivation

Set	Variables Entered	pr	pr^2	R	R^2	Increment in R^2	Fisher's Protected t	F	df
1	Demographic								
	Birth rank[a]	-.0052	.0000	.0181	.0003	.0003			
	Religion[b]								
	Protestant	.0872	.0076	.0381	.0014	.0011	n.s.		
	Catholic	.1442	.0208	.1906	.0363	.0349	n.s.		
	Jewish	-.0000	.0000	.1906	.0363	.0000	n.s.		
Whole set				.1906	.0363			1.688	4,179
2	Maternal identification	-.0141	.0002	.1965	.0386	.0022	n.s.		
	Paternal identification	-.0510	.0026	.1970	.0388	.0002	n.s.		
	Femininity (BSRI)	.2944	.0867	.3828	.1465	.1077	.000		
	Mother's care (PCR)	.1658	.0275	.4423	.1957	.0491	.029		
	Father's care (PCR)	.0173	.0003	.4424	.1957	.0000	n.s.		
	Feminism II	-.2898	.0840	.5062	.2562	.0605	.000		
	Masculinity (BSRI)	.0995	.0099	.5134	.2636	.0074	n.s.		
Whole set		.4857	.2359	.5134	.2636	.2272		7.584**	7,172
3	Interactions								
	Mat x Pat Identification	.0872	.0076	.5186	.2690	.0053	n.s.		
	PCR (Mother, Father)	-.1020	.0104	.5261	.2768	.0079	n.s.		
	BSRI Fem x Mascu (Androgyny)	-.0412	.0017	.5273	.2780	.0013	n.s.		
Whole set		-.1404	.0197	.5273	.2781	.0145		1.131	3,169

Table 1 (continued)

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of the Four Sets of Independent Variables and Degree of Parenthood Motivation

Set	Variables Entered	pr	pr^2	R	R^2	Increment in R^2	Fisher's Protected t	F	df
4	Minor Independent Variables								
	Career orientation[c]	.0574	.0033	.5322	.2833	.0052	n.s.		
	Religious identification	.0537	.0029	.5323	.2833	.0000	n.s.		
	Mother enjoyed childrearing	.1345	.0181	.5397	.2913	.0080	n.s.		
	Mother successful at childrearing	-.0374	.0014	.5434	.2953	.0041	n.s.		
	Father enjoyed childrearing	.1020	.0104	.5438	.2958	.0044	n.s.		
	Father successful at childrearing	-.0500	.0025	.5457	.2977	.0020	n.s.		
	Happiness of family life	-.1030	.0106	.5505	.3030	.0053	n.s.		
	Effect on family	.0200	.0004	.5513	.3039	.0009	n.s.		
	Family size	.3089	.0954	.6054	.3666	.0627	.001		
Whole set		.3501	.1226	.6054	.3666	.0885		2.482*	9,160

Note. N = 184 for all variables.

[a]Birthrank coded as follows: only and first born = 1; middle = 2; youngest = 3.

[b]Religion coded as a set of dummy variables (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Others).

[c]Career orientation coded as follows: 1 = stereotypically "masculine" field; 2 = neuter field, 3 = "feminine" field.

**p < .01

*p < .05

Table 2

Correlations Between Independent Variables and Degree of Parenthood Motivation

Independent Variable	r
Birthrank	-.018
Religion	
Protestant	.033
Catholic	.161*
Jewish	-.126
Maternal identification	-.049
Paternal identification	-.018
Mother's care (PCR)	.281***
Father's care (PCR)	.163*
Femininity (BSRI)	.338***
Masculinity (BSRI)	.030
Dempewolff's Feminism II	-.342***
Present identification with organized religion	.162*
Mother enjoyed childrearing	.266***
Mother successful at childrearing	.240**
Father enjoyed childrearing	.120
Father successful at childrearing	.100
Happiness of family life	.204**
Effect on family	.143
Family size	.281***
Career orientation	.082

***p < .001
**p < .01
*p < .05

Table 3

Rank Order of Frequency with which Reasons and Problems Were Judged to be Most Important by Overall Sample, and Top Quartile of Feminism II and the Dependent Measure (Want Children)

Reason	Overall Sample	Feminism II	Dependent Measure
To experience the honesty and freshness of children	1	1	1
To participate in the miracle of birth	2	2	2
Because being a parent is something you feel you can do well	3	3	3
To raise a child as you would like to have been brought up	(6)	4	(7)
Because you might raise someone who could change the world for the better	4	5	(8.5)
Children add interest and spice to family life	5	(6)	4
To give life meaning	(7)	(11)	5
Problem	**Overall Sample**	**Feminism II**	**Dependent Measure**
It makes it difficult to pursue a career	1	1	1
It leaves you too little time for yourself	2	2	(7)
It is expensive to raise them	(7)	(8)	2
They might turn out badly because you didn't do a good job	3.5	(6)	3
The lack of freedom to do as you please	3.5	3	(7)
The problem of overpopulation	(6)	(8)	4
There are too many responsibilities involved	5	4	(12)
They might turn out badly through no fault of your own	(8)	5	(12)
You are not as free to end a bad marriage	(9)	(11.5)	5

Note. N = 176 for overall sample, and 43 for Feminism II and the dependent measure.

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